



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Woodcut for "Die Bibel in Bildern"
1860.Schnorr von Carolsfeld Bibel in Bildern 1860 200.png



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

St. Frances de Sales

*It is good to mistrust ourselves,
but how would that advantage us
were we not to throw all our confidence on God,
and to wait on His mercy?
If you feel no such confidence,
cease not on that account from making these acts
and from saying to Our Lord:
"Yet, O Lord, though I have no feeling of confidence in You,
nevertheless, I know that You are my God,
that I am all Yours,
and that I have no hope but in Your goodness;
so, I abandon myself entirely into Your Hands."
It is always in our power to make these acts;
although we have difficulty in performing them,
still there is no impossibility.
Thus we testify faithfulness to our Lord.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
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Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.
- ▶ Today's principle theme is God's judgment—a reminder that we are to approach God in humble submission.
- ▶ God hears the cry of the poor and oppressed and offers them divine justice.
- ▶ The liturgies of fall Ordinary Time are moving slowly to their culmination.
- ▶ Concentration on last things and the judgment of God comes into sharp focus.
- ▶ When we consider the transitory nature of life it leads us to contemplation on God's ultimate mercy.
- ▶ The tax collector in today's Gospel is fully aware of his need for God's mercy. Without God's kindness and mercy he has no options.
- ▶ The Pharisee is so self-righteous that he fears nothing—his arrogance blinds him to his total dependence on God. He feels he has an "in"—nothing to worry about—he is one of the righteous ones. He is hardly a paragon of humble submission to God's will. The Pharisee provides an object lesson for all of us—we are to take note.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18

- ▶ One must understand the covenant between God and Israel in order to appreciate today's reading from Sirach. God entered into a covenant with Israel. God would care and provide for the people and in return the people would love God with heart and soul and care for one another. Care for one another would be an extension of love for God.
- ▶ Today's pericope comes from a section devoted to prayer and sacrifice.
- ▶ Sacrifice is pleasing to God only when the one offering it is faithful to the covenant. When that is not the case, God considers sacrifice an abomination.
- ▶ Sacrifice and conversion of heart go hand in hand.
- ▶ Sirach insists that all people are equal in the eyes of God.
- ▶ God looks as kindly upon the poor person's gift as he does on the rich person's gift.
- ▶ The New Testament affirms a theology of God's unmerited grace. In other words, people can do nothing to merit salvation—it is God's initiative and God's unmerited action.
- ▶ Even though Sirach insists that God is impartial in dealing with the human community, he does believe in merited grace—that is, people are justified through observance of the Torah (a belief held by the Pharisee in Jesus' parable today).
- ▶ A point of interest: the book of Sirach was not accepted in the Hebrew and

Protestant canons even though it was a Jewish favorite through the eleventh century. Second only to the psalms, Sirach has been used in Christian worship more than any other text.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Put yourself or someone close to you in the place of the poor person in this reading. Have you ever had an experience in which God upheld your life, cared for you and/or protected you?
- ▶ Who are the poor people in our communities that God promises to protect? In what way is that promise fulfilled in our midst?
- ▶ What does your experience teach you about God?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God’s relationship with us?

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18

- ▶ It is important to note that even though Paul’s own situation was dire, he was writing to encourage and challenge Timothy in his struggles.
- ▶ The language of libation was a common image and metaphor used by Greeks, Romans and Jews alike.
- ▶ The pagans poured wine on the ground in honor of and in homage to the pagan gods.
- ▶ Jewish people often associated it with the offering of sacrifice.
- ▶ Paul used the image to refer to his own life situation—his life was being poured out in sacrifice for others. He is an example for us faith, hope and redemptive suffering.
- ▶ No matter the opposition, Paul remained steadfast in his God-ordained mandate to spread the Good News and he was exhorting Timothy to follow suit.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ Have you or anyone you know ever sacrificed or suffered for the sake of another person?
- ▶ What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ What do human beings gain from sacrificing themselves for the sake of other people?
- ▶ What did your experience teach you about God?
- ▶ Why is it such a treasured spiritual principle?

Gospel: Luke 18, 1-8

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Luke is the only evangelist to relate this parable.
- ▶ Even though the word Pharisee conjures negative overtones in most of us today and is usually associated with hypocrisy, and even though the Pharisees in today's parable and in other Gospel situations act in a less than honorable manner, not all Pharisees were bad.
- ▶ Luke provides various portraits of the Pharisee. It was a Pharisee that warned Jesus about Herod's desire to kill him. Sadducees were the ruling party. They were responsible for Jesus' trial and execution.
- ▶ The Pharisees for the most part were observant Jews. The people respected them and looked to them for guidance.
- ▶ Today's parable depicts a Pharisee who no doubt fasted, tithed and tried to avoid sin.
- ▶ Pharisees helped order Jewish life. They sought to bring the Temple into the home by establishing cleanliness and dietary guidelines to be observed by Jewish families.
- ▶ While the word *Pharisee* might equate with hypocrisy according to modern sensibilities, that was not the case in first century Palestine.

- ▶ Luke, however, alerts the reader to a problem with the Pharisee in verse nine.
- ▶ One interpretation suggests that this parable is a reflection on the temple and the kingdom of God. A temple perspective would have assumed the Pharisee was a holy man. He belonged in the temple—he was righteous and entitled to his place within the holy space.
- ▶ Contrast that with the tax collector. He knew he had no right to the temple space. He was distant and stood on the periphery. His prayer was an acknowledgement of his sin and need for God's mercy.
- ▶ So far, so good. Nothing was out of the ordinary—all was as expected. The Pharisee was a holy man, the tax collector was not.
- ▶ The surprise of the parable—the hook—occurs when each character leaves the sacred space to return to their homes.
- ▶ The shocking element in the vignette comes when the tax collector is described as righteous. Righteous? Where is his repentance?
- ▶ There is no behavior by either the Pharisee or the tax collector that one should emulate.
- ▶ There is a simple message in this parable: the worldview of the believer just took a drastic detour. The temple no longer determined who is righteous and who is not righteous.
- ▶ The temple no longer determines insiders from outsiders.
- ▶ NO longer does holiness reside only in the temple. Holiness now resides in a space other than the designated sacred space. Holiness resides outside the temple in what is now the kingdom of God—the place where the tax collector resides.
- ▶ The parable sets up the temple as unholy and the kingdom of God outside the temple as holy.
- ▶ Another common interpretation is that the tax collector knows he is not righteous but the Pharisee is certain that he is. Bottom line? We are not righteous as a result of our own actions.
- ▶ The parable is an object lesson for believers. It is very easy to judge oneself in light of other more sinful people around us. Our own sinfulness is not as glaring when compared to those we consider more sinful than ourselves.
- ▶ It is very easy to feel smug and self-righteous when we are paragons of virtue, follow all laws and are exemplary believers. We become blinded to our own sinfulness; we easily forget our dependence on God's mercy.
- ▶ The lesson is to embrace a posture of submission and humility before God.
- ▶ The Pharisee was not opened to God's mercy and grace and thus did not receive it. The Tax collector knew he needed it, was open to it and received it in abundance.
- ▶ The Pharisee praised himself. The tax collector judged himself a sinner. Herein lie two approaches to God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this parable teach you about what is holy and what is not?
- ▶ What is the lesson for you?
- ▶ How would you judge your own standing before God?
- ▶ Put yourself in the place of the Pharisee. In what way can you relate to his attitude before God? What does that teach you about your relationship with God? Where is conversion needed?
- ▶ Put yourself in the place of the tax collector. In what way can you relate to his attitude before God? What does that teach you about your relationship with God? What is the challenge for the tax collector? What are the challenges for you?
- ▶ What are the implications of this parable for you as a believer?
- ▶ What are the implications of a Pharisee-like attitude in the Christian community?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

APPENDIX

#1. Even though I am hardly considered poor as the poor person in today's reading, I can relate to being poor in spirit. I look at the events of my life and I see the hand of God throughout my life. When I grumble about God's snail's pace response to some of my most fervent requests I am reminded that God sees the entire tapestry of my life and knows what is needed when it is needed. When I trust God's wisdom and benevolence all things work together for good. When I do not, I find myself still waiting. The only thing God asks of me is trust and patience. How do I acquire trust and patience? I wait. Even though I cannot merit his gratuitous mercy, I need to be a receptive vessel to receive it. God helps mold and shape that vessel so I often find myself waiting.

#2. A man in our parish volunteered to be fired so an older man could keep his job. He insisted that in this economy it would be far easier for him to find work than it would be for the older gentleman. He trusted that God would take care of him and his family. The trust of this young man has been an inspiration to all of us and is a reminder that there are amazing people in our midst who are willing to sacrifice themselves so others can live. No greater love could this young man have than to give of himself so another person can have life to the fullest. I can only hope to achieve his level of self-sacrifice, faith and trust in God. He is a living example of the sacrifice of Jesus that continues today.

#3. The challenge of this parable is to alter our worldview regarding who belongs in our communities and who does not belong. We give lip service to who belongs. We say everyone is welcome. We begin our liturgies on some Sundays singing the song, "All Are Welcome" when in truth all are not welcome. Today's parable is a challenge to ask ourselves who we do not welcome—who are the outcast sinners in our world today.

Most of the time our community welcomes everyone. The outreach in our community is exemplary. Our parish gives over a half a million dollars a year to the world's poor. There is a true sense that we are responsible for our brothers and sisters welfare. Yet some times we fall short as in the case of the usher who recently put a mentally ill man out of our church assembly because he was unkempt and noisy. Obviously it was determined that he was an outsider.

Many years ago I attended a funeral of a gay man in a parish in the Midwest. He had many friends and loved ones who attended the funeral. Some of the parishioners of that parish were appalled that there was a funeral for this man. They were dripping in judgment. They obviously made the determination that he was an outsider.

All of us have a story that can illustrate who qualifies as insiders and who qualifies as outsiders. None of us are completely innocent when it comes to such judgments. It is very tempting to think we are the righteous ones when we are immersed in things holy. Yet that is exactly why we need to be vigilant.

Jesus' salvation was open to all sinners. It is God's job to judge—not ours. It is our job to love, acknowledge our own sinfulness and ask God for healing and reconciliation. I constantly find myself judging when I clearly should not judge. This parable is a warning and a reminder. Do I want to find myself with the blind Pharisee who is unable to see his sin or with the tax collector who is fully aware of his sin and his need for God's mercy? I desire the latter, but often find myself with the former.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Catholic Social teaching
Morality
Moral Decision Making
Sin and Grace

Sacrament of Reconciliation
Cross and Paschal Mystery
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The issue of who is an insider and who is an outsider in today's parable is a reminder to us that all are equal in the eyes of God. There is basic dignity in every human person. It is the responsibility of Catholic social teaching to remind us that there are no outsiders in the kingdom of God unless people deliberately put themselves outside the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

MORALITY

The issue of what constitutes a moral action is pertinent in today's parable. The tax collector knows he is a sinner and the Pharisee is sure he is not. He has no need for God. He is certain of his righteousness. Moral teaching reminds us how to determine what constitutes a moral action. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

The issue of what constitutes a moral action is pertinent in today's parable. The tax collector knows he is a sinner and the Pharisee is sure he is not. He has no need for God. He is certain of his righteousness. One cannot make a decision to act morally unless he or she knows what constitutes a moral action. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

SIN AND GRACE

Today's parable illustrates self-righteous blindness in the person of the Pharisee. He is certain that he is righteous when in fact he is not. The tax collector is a sinner who is aware of his sin. The latter repented the former did not. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about SIN AND GRACE.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

We are blessed to have a remedy for the sin in our lives. The tax collector was aware of his sinfulness...he made the first step toward reconciliation with God—he acknowledged his sinfulness and showed contrition for his sins. Such is the basis for the sacrament of reconciliation. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention today on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

Paul reminds Timothy to remain steadfast in the face of suffering and persecution. It is a call to embrace the cross and live the paschal mystery of Christ. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.